

The INQUIRER

www.inquirer.org.uk

85p

The voice of British and Irish Quakers and Free Christians Issue 7781 29 October 2011

PROCESSED

NOV 01 2011

GTU LIBRARY

Occupied London

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

Subscribe Write to Lorna Hill
24 Lodge Lane
Keymer, Hassocks
West Sussex, BN6 8NA
ph: 01273 844940

e: inquirersubs@gmail.com

Annual subscriptions are £30.

Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

Editor M Colleen Burns MA
46A Newmarket Road
Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover photo by Steve Millar

<http://stevemillar.co.uk>

Find out more Log on to

www.unitarian.org.uk

or email info@unitarian.org.uk

Write to

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

The goal is to live in such a way that our lives will prove worth dying for...
The one thing that can't be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go.

— The Rev Forrest Church

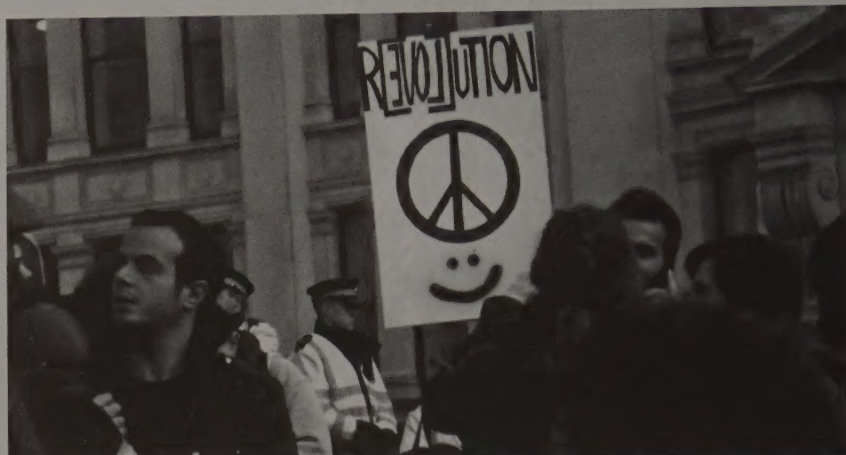


Photo by Steve Millar

Faith among the occupiers

It's hard to know now, before this issue of *The Inquirer* goes to press, where the 'Occupy' movement will be when it's published. It's 20 October and rumours are already spreading that leaders at St Paul's Cathedral would like the occupiers to pitch their tents elsewhere. But none of that is confirmed. I think that's unlikely since Canon Dr Giles Fraser asked the protesters to stay and the police to leave when they turned up at St Paul's on 15 October.

Canon Fraser has been an articulate voice for economic justice at the St Paul's Institute. The institute is an educational think tank that seeks to bring Christian ethics to bear on questions of finance and economics. A column he wrote in support of the Robin Hood Tax – also backed by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches – appeared in *The Inquirer* in March. He said then that people should be angry with the banks.

Many people are justifiably outraged, not least because it seems that we have been round this one time and again, and nothing seems to change. After the credit crunch, the Archbishop of Canterbury challenged those working in banking 'to stop and wonder whether this might be a moment of enormous and strange opportunity'. It was an opportunity not taken.

But perhaps most of us have not been outraged enough; or, rather, we have expressed a generalised sort of outrage, without ever having tried to fathom out the details of what has been going on.

I hope he still feels the same way.

There is a place for faith in the debate and in the movement. Unitarian Universalist ministers have been doing vespers services at the Occupy Boston encampment. I just read that a Simchat Torah service was held at Occupy Wall Street in Zucotti park.

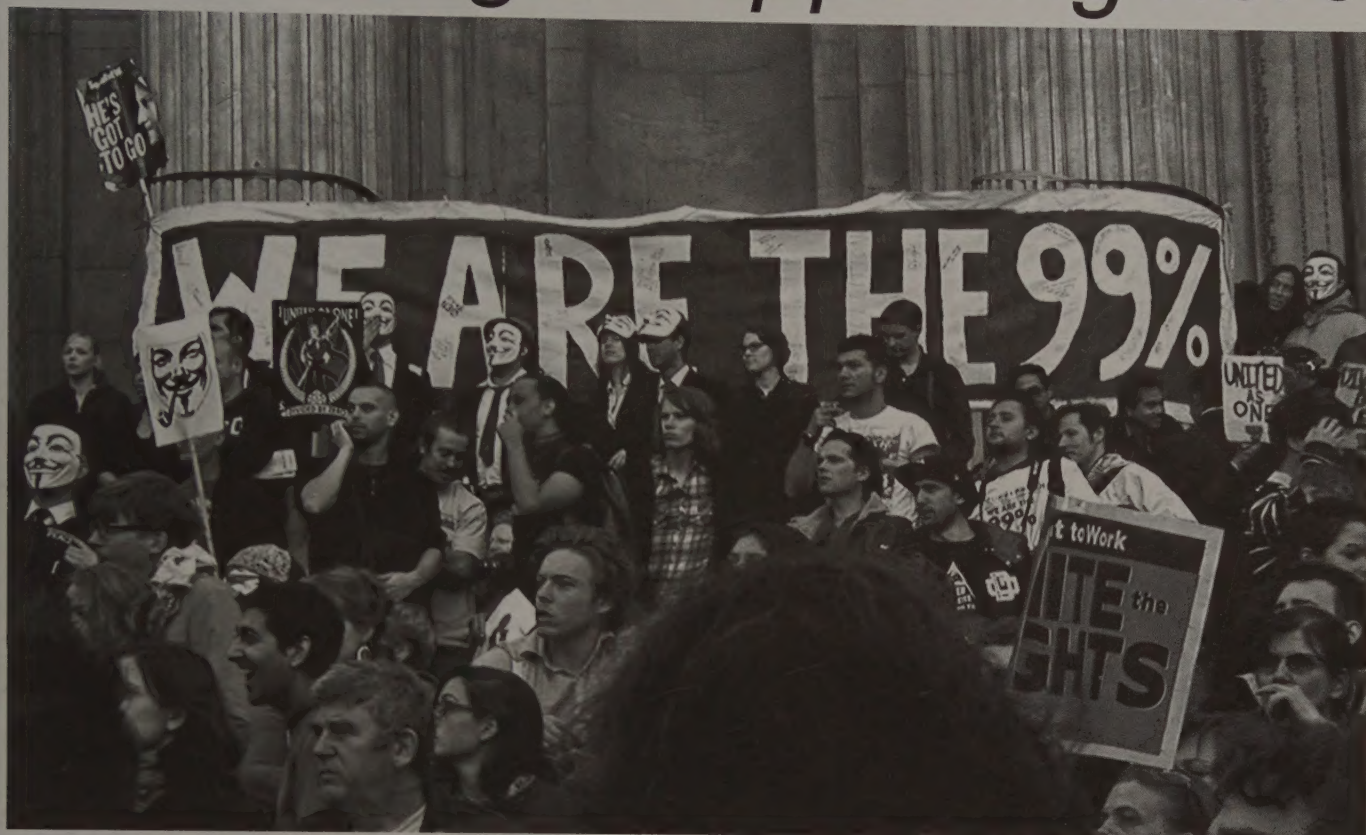
London Unitarian ministers are making plans to support the protesters on 29 October. They will be happy for anyone to join them and perhaps bring along cakes or other treats for the occupiers. For more information, email the Rev Linda Hart on revlahart@gmail.com

— MC Burns

Clarification

Because of an editing error, a note was left off Kate McKenna's article on Michael Servetus in the 15 October issue of 'The Inquirer'. It should have attributed the biographical information to 'Michael Servetus: Heretic or Saint' by Radovan Lovci, trans. Mirek Katzl, 2008.

Something's happening here



Occupiers on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Photo by Steve Millar <http://stevemillar.co.uk>

By Linda Hart

The news about the movement began as a trickle and has increased to a river. The participation begun as a handful, and now it has spread from Wall Street in New York to cities and towns all over the United States and to major cities around the world including London. Thousands are camping out and sleeping rough and attending events that occupy financial centres and city centres. The Occupy movement continues to grow in numbers and influence. As Buffalo Springfield sang in 1967, 'There's something happening here. What it is ain't exactly clear.'

What is clear to anyone who has been following the news about the economic crisis is that these recent years of turmoil have benefited the wealthiest in the world and have created financial difficulties for the rest of us. Rising prices, rising inflation, stagnant income, and slashes to benefits and social supports in the name of debt reduction has little effect on the elite, but is causing chaos in the lives of those least able to afford these measures.

Whilst this kind of rhetoric has been dismissed as the whingeing of a group of unemployed, feckless, unaware ne'er-do-well individuals who simply are seeking attention, when the conservative media begin to speak sympathetically about the cause and the issue, it is more than obvious that something extraordinary is afoot.

On 14 October, Sally Kohn published an opinion piece on the Fox News website. In it she states very simply, 'The question is not how Occupy Wall Street protesters can find that gross discrepancy immoral. The question is why every one of us isn't protesting with them.' Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch is well known for its conservative slant to the news,

and for its distortion of facts to suit its biases. For an opinion piece to not only acknowledge that the Occupy Wall Street protesters might be on to something, but that it is worth the support of the wider public is nothing short of astonishing.

Equally, Polly Toynbee cites an article in the anything-but-liberal Financial Times in her Guardian commentary on 17 October. She quotes and amplifies their comments:

"Today only the foolhardy would dismiss a movement reflecting the anger and frustration of ordinary citizens from all walks of life around the world ... the fundamental call for a fairer distribution of wealth cannot be ignored." The American dream "has been shattered by a crisis brought about by financial excess and political cynicism. The consequence has been growing inequality, rising poverty and sacrifice by those least able to bear it – all of which are failing to deliver economic growth." It ends thus: "The cry for change is one that must be heeded." The Guardian says it often, but here's the FT saying rising inequality is not just socially but economically disastrous. The majority now know it, with no rise in living standards for years as growth is gobbled up by the greedy 1%.

There *is* something happening here. And in case you don't understand what these occupiers are trying to get across yet, be assured that they are crafting a statement of what this is all about. Here's what was posted on their website (occupylondon.org.uk) on 16 October:

- 1) The current system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives; this is where we work towards them.
- 2) We are of all ethnicities, backgrounds, genders, generations, sexualities, dis/abilities and faiths. We stand together with

(Continued on next page)

This is what democracy looks like

(Continued from previous page)

occupations all over the world.

3) We refuse to pay for the banks' crisis.

4) We do not accept the cuts as either necessary or inevitable. We demand an end to global tax injustice and our democracy representing corporations instead of the people.

5) We want regulators to be genuinely independent of the industries they regulate.

6) We support the strike on the 30th November and the student action on the 9th November, and actions to defend our health services, welfare, education and employment, and to stop wars and arms dealing.

7) We want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world's resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich.

8) We stand in solidarity with the global oppressed and we call for an end to the actions of our government and others in causing this oppression.

9) This is what democracy looks like. Come and join us!

My husband Peter and I had a rare day free of other obligations and child care concerns, so we went to see for ourselves and to be a small part of the event. Unable to occupy the stock exchange, the London protesters are encamped outside St Paul's where Canon Dr Giles Fraser welcomed them to set up. It was a busy scene populated by tourists going to see St Paul's, onlookers like us, residents (only identifiable when next to their tents), and cameras and reporters everywhere.

A woman with a loudspeaker announced that the general meeting would be taking place around the corner shortly and invited anyone who wanted to attend to come along. The area was festooned by signs of every sort: hand written in thin biro, carefully lettered with paints, a massive cloth banner, crumpled cardboard scrawled with black markers; some signs supported the idea, some attacked the protesters, some were humorous, some terrifying. Bunting outlined the tent city where the full time residents were living, giving it a strangely festive feel.

We wandered around, listening in to conversations, watching the police watching the moving mass of people and ob-



Photo by Steve Millar

serving the small city that is being built. There is a communal kitchen area, an information zone (with volunteers to talk to you if you wish), medical tents, and a gazebo identified as the media contact.

As the time for the meeting approached, a few men took to the low steps of the cathedral, and made announcements in the manner used by the Wall Street Occupiers who are not permitted to use amplification. One man spoke in short phrases that were then echoed by the two men nearby, a collaborative process to make themselves heard. In New York they call it the 'human microphone'. We might call it 'Chinese shouts', a new way to play that game where the point is that everyone helps each other to hear. Again, all were invited to attend, and so we went.

It took a few minutes to sort out just what was happening. The woman who had been making announcements through the loudspeaker was leading the meeting and still using the amplification to be heard. It became clear that this was a time to gather people who were working on different matters. Reports were offered and responses were welcomed, new ideas aired, and the gathered company sought consensus in that sometimes grinding conversation that is the real heart of democracy. Hands were raised and waved to note agreement as they all listened carefully to one another and the moderator sought to move everything along.

It was an inspiring visit and I plan to go back and to find ways to support it, even if it is just giving a tenner to support them through the website. I encourage you to find your way to make your voice heard, too, and to support the effort as you can.

What must be said, however – and what we will likely forget once our condition here in the first world improves – is that even as most of us are among the 99% in the United Kingdom or the USA or Europe who have borne the burden of the financial crises of the recent past, we are still among the 1% of the world with privileges luxuries utterly unknown elsewhere in the world. We will not have achieved what is needed until the change is felt all the way through, to the very least of our sisters and brothers around the globe.

There is much to be done, but with our hands and hearts to do it, how could we fail?

The Rev Linda Hart is minister at Richmond.

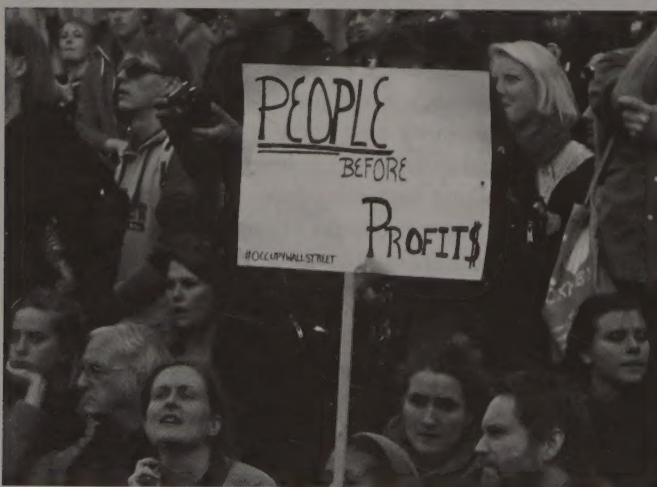
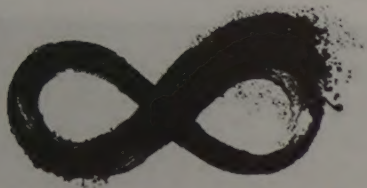


Photo by Steve Millar

20 November is Compassion Sunday



Charter for Compassion

By Sue Woolley

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches has designated the third Sunday in November (19th) as 'Charter for Compassion Sunday', on which all Unitarians are encouraged to either hold a service on the theme of compassion, or to go out and do something compassionate. A worship pack on the Charter for Compassion has been created by the Worship Panel. It is available by post from Essex Hall (address on page 2) or by download at:

www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Compassion_Worship_Pack.pdf or <http://bit.ly/pZyZzv>

Last summer, the General Assembly was welcomed as a Partner of Charter for Compassion, established to support the work of the well known religious commentator, Karen Armstrong, in promoting compassion, the "Golden Rule" and inter-faith dialogue.

The General Assembly's Chief Officer Derek McAuley and Sue Woolley received confirmation from the Charter for Compassion that their application had been successful saying: "The Charter for Compassion team is thrilled to welcome the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in the UK to our Partner Network."

Two short months after the unanimous vote in favour of becoming a Partner Organisation was passed at the General Assembly Meetings in Swansea, we achieved our aim. But that was only the start. The whole point of being a Partner in the Charter for Compassion is that we make practical compassion the centre of our lives, both personally and as

Unitarian communities. So what happens next? In addition to the aforementioned worship pack and designated Sunday, several initiatives are in the process of being implemented:

- The setting up of an online Charter for Compassion Engagement Group, which is an online forum on which members can post ideas, inspirations, worship material, and share how they are implementing their commitment to the principles of the Charter for Compassion. If you are interested in participating in this, please e-mail Sue Woolley at sue.woolley@virgin.net
- Developing the General Assembly website, to include a statement affirming our commitment to the Charter for Compassion, the text of the Charter and various links to different parts of the Charter for Compassion website, so that people can find out more about it. This is to be part of a new section of the GA website, concerning Unitarian and social issues
- The incorporation of the Charter's principles into the Chalice Award Scheme (because of the changeover in the management structure of the General Assembly, this is on hold at the moment)

Several congregations have already set up Reading Groups to study Karen Armstrong's Book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, and many ministers are incorporating reflections on the Charter's values into their worship and blogs.

Sue Woolley, who seconded the motion at the General Assembly Meetings, is acting as our main liaison with the Charter for Compassion, and may be contacted at 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN or by e-mail at sue.woolley@virgin.net.

For further information on the Charter for Compassion see: <http://charterforcompassion.org/site/>

For further information on the Unitarian Commitment to the Charter contact Sue Woolley at sue.woolley@virgin.net or Derek McAuley at dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk

Interfaith event celebrated charter

Our interfaith Charter for Compassion event at Golders Green Unitarians in July brought together people of all religions in a celebration of the Charter and explored its significance in politics, international relations and in all our everyday lives.

Among those speaking were the Executive Secretary of the IARF, several executive members of the World Congress of Faiths and representatives of two humanitarian causes which embody the spirit of the Charter: the 'Oasis of Peace', the peace village in Israel which brings together Israelis and Palestinians in harmonious co-existence, and Womankind Worldwide.

There was a lively discussion by the multi-faith audience present and the day ended with an interfaith service, at which there was a collection, which raised £300 for the University of Leeds breast cancer appeal of the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research. A cheque for £200 was handed over to the Peace Fellowship appeal for Womankind Worldwide as a further expression of our practical compassion in the spirit of the day.

Below is an excerpt of a message from the Charter for Compassion organisation which was read out by the Rev Dr Richard Boeke, chair of the British Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom and the former Chair and

Honorary Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths:

We honour your "open faith community that celebrates diverse beliefs" and we respect your mission "to create a caring community where all feel supported in our search for meaning and value."

— Feargus O'Connor



LDPA Minister David Usher speaks at the Interfaith event. The Rev Feargus O'Connor is on the left.

At Samhain: Meditate on

*Death is before me today
like the recovery of a sick man,
like going forth into a garden after sickness.*

*Death is before me today
like the odour of myrrh,
like sitting under a sail in a good wind.*

*Death is before me today
like the course of a stream,
like the return of a man from the war-galley to his home.*

*Death is before me today:
like the home that a man longs to see
after years spent as a captive.*

— Pyramid Texts, 3000BCE

By Audette Fulbright

We all live with death close at hand. Sometimes it is touching our lives directly, because someone we love is dying or has died. Sometimes its presence is oblique, and we turn our eyes away, avoiding it. And then one day death is immediate; it is our turn at the door. We may learn that we have a death sentence, or we may live unaware of the hour of our death, but always we *are* under a death sentence, known or unknown, for none yet as escaped this life alive.

As human beings, whether we are alone in this talent or not, we do live our lives with the comprehension, however vague, that we will someday die. Alongside this truth lies another: most of us do not prepare ourselves for death. No matter how long the life, the majority of us come to our own end with some surprise and sense that we are not yet ready. Even if we are given the news of our impending death, only some of us will spend that time making a real peace with life and letting go.

Our culture has a deeply disturbed relationship to death. Primarily we avoid it; and we outsource the care of the dying to “professionals.” We do not hold an understanding of ourselves as profoundly capable of handling the dying of others, or of dying, ourselves.

From a more public context, our exposure to death is filled with horror. We have an unhealthy tendency toward violence and suffering. We transmute our fears and anxieties about death quite often into brutal and soul-less glorifying of nasty endings. Even what is supposed to inform us — our news — there is a maxim: if it bleeds, it leads.

Wired to fear death

It is natural to have some fear of death. It is an unknown, and we have reasons, biological and psychological, to fear the unknown — adaptive reasons, healthy reasons. Most of all, what motivates our fear is not death per se but the suffering that might come before death. Our alienation of death's place in the fullness of our lives is a piece of this puzzle. Since we do not embrace death, place it within the normal sphere of our lives, face it with living ritual and reflection, we live our lives without benefit of the wisdom death brings to some who — by choice or by fate — are forced to recognise its place within the context of their own experience.

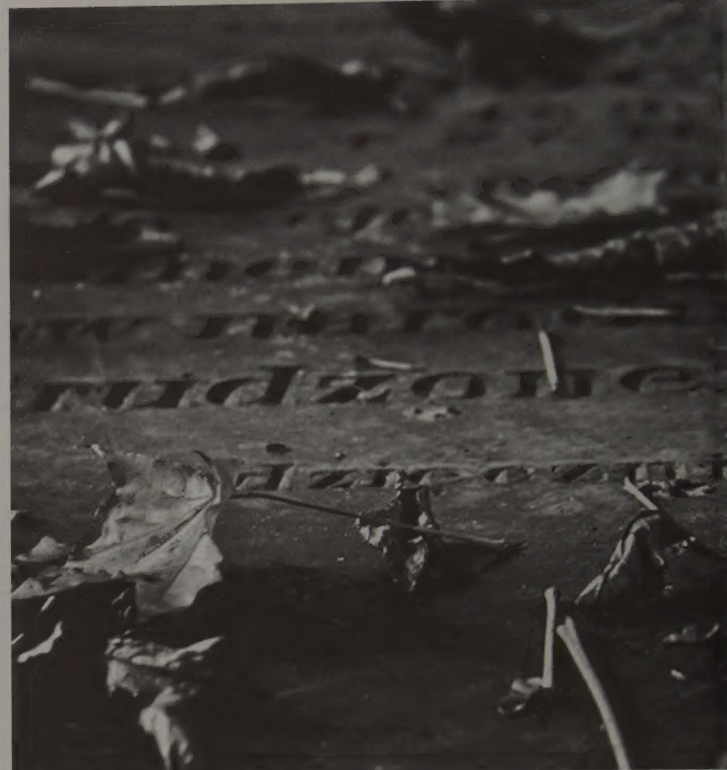


Photo by Mattox

The Rev Forrest Church paid much thoughtful consideration to death. He said, ‘Religion is the human response to being alive and having to die.’ But what does that mean for a religious person? Little is solved by “being religious” if a faithful exploration of death is not a part of our spiritual journey. We must look death in the eye, and discover what it has to teach us.

Wicca marks the turn of the wheel

I always feel drawn to the Wiccan tradition at this time of year. That pagan spirituality draws deeply from the wisdom of nature. So autumn and winter are seasons of death and rebirth. October 31 is a sabbat, one of the great turnings of the wheel of life and death. On Samhain, the wheel lands on “death,” and the veils between life and death become thinnest. Many people, pagan or not, find autumn to be a time when we are more aware of death. Leaves are turning and falling; harvest is done, cold and dark days lie ahead. All summer verdancy we have revelled in fades away. The pagan religion does not impose itself on nature; instead it rises up from what wisdom may be found there.

Religion, to be useful in our lives, must adequately treat death. As Unitarians, we are at an awkward phase in our religious lives. Having largely walked away from many of the rituals of our Christian roots, we are left with few religious practices. We must borrow from others.

This is not as bad as it sounds. All religions are accretions of others, all are built on human experience and none sprung full blown from Zeus' head, no matter what you may have heard. So even if we are borrowing or stealing, we need to bring into our religious lives a practice of living with dying, a practice of looking directly at death, and asking what it demands of our lives. There should be two special times of the year when this kind of work is done — but mind, this is my opinion only. You

ath and confront the fear



October 31 is a sabbat, one of the great turnings of the wheel of life and death. On Samhain, the wheel lands on "death," and the veils between life and death become thinnest.

might have other ideas about the when. I believe autumn, say – Halloween, Samhain time? – is the time to face death directly. I believe Midwinter – New Year? Imbolc, in February? – is a time for asking what needs to be born again in us.

I want to invite you into a practice of breathing death, a time of reflection on what death has meant in your own life. Maybe you have lost a loved one. Maybe you have come close to death; maybe you know your own death is not so far away. If you knew you were dying – if you had a year left to live – what would you do differently?

The poet Kabir said: what we call salvation belongs to the time before death./ If you don't break your ropes while you are alive/do you think ghosts will do it for you afterward?/...what is found now is found then."

If you had only one year . . .

What would you let go of, if you were going to die in a year's time? What would you say to those you love, to those you are alienated from? What amends would you make? What joys would you pursue? If someone you loved were dying, what would you say to them? How would you love them differently?

But someone you love *is* dying. We just forget it, or choose not to remember. We simply opt to put off living as if it truly mattered, as if every tomorrow were given.

When my daughter was born, I suddenly understood how much everything mattered. At the same time, this new and horrible existential fear rose up in me: what if she died? How would I live if she did not?

So I began death meditations. I sat down and imagined life without my daughter, her life without me, my life after my grandparents, the world without me. In time, I moved past the anxious reactions to a more healthy place of knowing that I love her every moment we are together, and will do my very

best to love and live life whatever happens. I have to do this again sometimes. I'm not perfect.

Sometimes I am just like Shirley MacLaine at the beginning of *Terms of Endearment*. She walks into a darkened room and looks into a cot. Then she calls out, "Herb, she not breathing." "She's breathing!" yells an exasperated man, who clearly has heard this before. "No, she isn't," Shirley says. She goes to the cot and reaches in and pinches the baby, who starts wailing. With relief and buoyancy, Shirley leaves the room, saying, "that's better!" I am the mum who will check, who worries when my husband is late or doesn't answer his phone.

Death reminds us that we do not have forever, that now matters, that today is the day we need to be alive. So though I worry, I practise nodding respectfully to death and trying to live with greater awareness.

Invite death in

This is why we should invite death into our lives, why we should acknowledge it as a part of life. I came across this quote, "Relate to each person you meet as if they will die tonight at midnight. Offer them whatever comfort and grace you would if you knew they were dying, for they are."

To some it sounds morbid. But it isn't. It is bringing into awareness all that matters in *life*, all the things that we truly value, all the depths that we want to love. Sadly, these most important things are the things we put off for some other day, sometime when we will have more time. It is a reminder too, as the Sanskrit prayer says,

Look to this day:

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course

Lie all the verities and realities of your existence.

The bliss of growth,

The glory of action,

The splendour of achievement

Are but experiences of time.

For yesterday is but a dream

And tomorrow is only a vision;

But today well-lived, makes

Yesterday a dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well therefore to this day.

Make it a practice of remembering your death, and asking yourself what, therefore, of your life? If you have a partner, talk about your death, and theirs. Talk about the deaths of those you love. How would you or they like to be remembered? What would you still like to do in this life, or say? What still needs healing or release? These are conversations that matter. They can be difficult or frightening at first, but in time they will lose some of their sting and instead aliveness will be their centre.

In honour of Samhain, in recognition of the cycles of life and death and life again, in celebration that matter cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed, let's centre ourselves for a metaphorical journey to sunless shores, for a time, too, of remembrance for all those we have bid goodbye.

Audette Fulbright is a Unitarian Universalist minister in Roanoke, Virginia.

Unitarians can build a bridge

By Derek McAuley

Building bridges should be one of the aspirations of the Unitarian Movement. This should happen at local, district and national level with us all working with like-minded people for common objectives. I seek to do only that which can be done nationally and relationships with others can develop in many different ways.

Earlier this year I received an invitation of a Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) seminar "Is there a Future for Community" with the Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks and Professor Robert Putnam. This seemed of interest in light of my thinking on the "Big Society" agenda and Unitarian perspectives on social change. Following the event I was in email contact with CCJ Chief Executive, Rev David Gifford and we agreed to meet in late July.

With offices in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral they are a short walk from Essex Hall. It proved an excellent opportunity to build bridges with David and his colleague Fiona Hulbert. Unitarians have been active locally in various CCJ branches across the country and our contributions over many years have been appreciated. It is clear that Unitarian chapels and churches can be seen as more neutral space for dialogue between Jews and Christians; particularly where traditional Christian iconography is absent.

We talked about how the General Assembly could work in partnership with CCJ for mutual benefit. I have pointed them towards our theological colleges and the work of the International Association of Religious Freedom in Israel bringing together Christian and Jewish religious leaders in interfaith encounter. We agreed to explore ideas to see if we can facilitate participation of Unitarian ministers in CCJ's highly regarded study course at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem. Fiona agreed to write an article for *The Inquirer* on CCJ's work and how Unitarians might contribute.

I have since joined a visit arranged by the Chairman of CCJ, Rt Rev Nigel McCullough, Bishop of Manchester, to the College of Arms. It was a nice social occasion with opportunities to chat informally in a non-religious context.

I would encourage Unitarians and Free Christians to join and participate in local CCJ activities. Our freedom from creeds may be one of our unique contributions to interfaith work in this country. We can be the bridge builders and facilitate communication and dialogue.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the General Assembly.

Our freedom from creeds may be one of our unique contributions to interfaith work in this country. We can be the bridge builders and facilitate communication and dialogue.

By Fiona Hulbert

Britain's first inter-faith organisation, the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) has worked for the last 70 years to build bridges between the Christian and Jewish communities, to educate, promote understanding and tackle prejudice and anti-Semitism. There are about 35 local branches around the country, providing a varied programme of cultural events and opportunities for dialogue, and working with others to organise events for Inter-faith Week, Holocaust Memorial Day and other occasions. Unitarians are involved in several areas.

As well as its network of branches, CCJ runs a number of national projects.

Side By Side supports chaplains in

Higher Education, and *Encounters* takes Jewish Rabbis to teach trainee Christian clergy and introduce them to issues in Christian-Jewish relations. Study tours are organised for clergy to visit Israel/Palestine and study with international lecturers at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Jerusalem. Lecture tours and Breakfast Seminars for business people complement behind-the-scenes work to bring groups together when political events or organisational actions cause tension and misunderstanding.

The world has changed a great deal since CCJ was founded in 1942, but some things have not changed as much as we would wish. It is encouraging that many of the churches have made statements repudiating centuries of prejudice against the Jewish people, but distressingly anti-Semitism is on the rise again in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, and CCJ's work of reconciliation is still much needed. Theological prejudice remains also – in many churches congregations are still taught that Christians have replaced the Jews in God's purposes. It is not uncommon to hear preachers speak of Judaism as something from the past, such as 'the Jews used to eat unleavened bread for Passover', or 'the Jews used to build booths'? Well, guess what? They still do.

Sadly, our young people may grow up with the same old prejudices. A schoolteacher told me recently about an introductory lesson she had taught her primary class about different faiths, after which they were asked to write about what they had learned and illustrate their essays. One boy drew a Jewish family having a Sabbath meal, but his teacher was puzzled to see that he had drawn the family all with green skin. 'Do Jews have green skin?' she asked the boy. He replied seriously, 'Well, I've never met a Jew, so I don't know'.

CCJ works for what the Jewish community call *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. We welcome new members who are open and inclusive in their beliefs, ready to learn from others and concerned for a just society in which everyone has a valued place. Unitarians should feel at home with us.

To learn more about CCJ and its projects and branches visit www.ccj.org.uk where you can also find details about becoming a member. Members receive regular newsletters and CCJ's excellent magazine *Common Ground* twice a year.

Fiona Hulbert is a Project Manager for CCJ.

Hope, courage and everlasting love

You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not Hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.

— John Murray

Whenever I feel despair both with myself or with the rest of humanity I try to remember these words by the Universalist preacher John Murray.

I have been in fulltime Unitarian ministry for a little over a year now. I have experienced a lot as I have attempted to put into practical application what I learnt at Unitarian College Manchester and of course what life in all its rich tapestry has taught me.

I turned 40 a few weeks back; this has led to a lot of personal reflection. I have changed immeasurably these last 10 years. This has not always been easy, in fact at times it has been deeply painful, but I can honestly say that I regret very little of it. Do not get me wrong. There are certain things I wish had never happened, not so much to me, more to the people I have loved. The phrase “We do not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it” from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, keeps on returning to my thoughts and emotions. I am a fortunate man indeed and I do count my many blessings, even on the difficult days.

It seems that I am being increasingly influenced by Universalism, in both the old meaning of the word and it's more modern incarnations. I remember at a minister's conference at Great Hucklow a couple of years ago, my friend and colleague the Rev Jane Barraclough described me as a Universalist. I was not sure what she meant by this at first, but I think I do today. I both believe in and experience a God of love who accepts all and rejects none; is present in all life and yet is greater than the entirety of it all. I also believe that there are many ways to understand and experience this universal love; it makes no sense to me to think that there can be only one way. This has given me a code of hopefulness that I can live by. It sustains me through the vicissitudes of life.

I have read a lot of Forrest Church's work these last few months as well as other Universalists too. I like what I have read, it has spoken to my head, my heart and above all my soul. It has helped me greatly as I have observed the world this past summer and the many horrors that we seem to inflict on one another. It has also helped me to come to terms with my past and the people I have shared my life with. It has enabled me come to terms with both the hope and despair that I experience from time to time.

I was recently reading Tom Owen-Towle's “The Gospel of Universalism: Hope Courage and the Love of God” recently. It spoke powerfully to me. Particularly when he spoke of hope and despair. He explained how they are joined together, at the hip, like Siamese twins. He describes that in the French language hope (espoir) and despair (desespoir) share the same root. He concluded from this that the opposite of hope is not actually despair but indifference. Indifference is to live without feeling or passion or care, to fail to respond to the pain and or suffering around, to deny our link to one another, to fail to feel another's pain, to care less. Yes people in the midst of despair

struggle and may even want to give up, but they keep on, hope is never too far away. Hope and despair are two branches formed from the same root of the one tree.

Universalism is a hope-filled faith, but that does not make it an easy path. It is not about sitting back and waiting to be rescued by the God of Love it promotes. Instead it declares that salvation, in this life, can only be achieved by facing up to the suffering present in all our lives and dealing directly with the despair that accompanies it.

Like everyone, I feel a deep sadness at times when I look at the horrors that we seem to inflict on one another. That said, I also live with deep hope that I know can fill the void that we all feel at one time or another.

I am very aware how truly blessed I am.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

See his blog at: <http://danny-crosby.blogspot.com/>



Danny Crosby

Global Chalice Lighting

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 99th in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. Every month, a reading is distributed to Unitarian and Universalist congregations around the world. Each congregation is asked to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the ‘Global Chalice Lighting’ for that month and naming the group which submitted it. It is hoped that the ICUU Global Chalice Lighting Project will enhance the worship experience in our congregations and raise awareness of the international dimensions of our religious movement.

This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during November 2011.

May this flame remind us of our own inward light, the centre of our being, that connects us to all Being and gives us strength and comfort in a troubled world.

*Jan Tendys
Australian and New Zealand Unitarian
Universalist Association
www.anzuua.org*

Headline was accurate, letter wasn't

To the Editor:

You perfectly encapsulate the Rev John Smith-Wilkinson's letter in the 15 October edition of *The Inquirer* with the use of title 'Following Jesus is not the problem, Christianity is.'

What a bizarre letter from a minister of a denomination which proudly upholds the liberal Christian tradition! As every GCSE Religious Studies student knows, the idea that it's possible to follow Jesus without reference to the teaching of the Church, which informs all our understandings of Jesus, not least in the New Testament recorded by its members, is just not tenable. The description of the theology of St Augustine, one of the Fathers of the Church whose sublime teaching still underpins modern Western Christianity, both conservative and liberal, as 'manic' and 'riddled with heretical pitfalls' beggars belief; as does the equally bare dismissal of the mainstream Christian doctrine of 'The Fall' as an 'inaccurate interpretation used to oppress every generation West of Athens since his [Augustine's] time – with dire consequences'. Yet it does not end there. 'The Trinity, the cornerstone of mainstream Christian orthodoxy, is also said, staggeringly, to be 'heretical'.

The highly informed Rev Victoria Weinstein, whose championing of Christian spirituality within Unitarianism provoked this response from Mr Smith-Wilkinson, need not worry too much about Unitarians pride in their intellectual uniqueness cutting them off from the broader Church if many others holding distinguished posts within our denomination hold views similar to Mr Smith-Wilkinson. If that is the case, the greatest problem for our ecumenical relations will be our intellectual credibility; something which has always won us respect amongst our fellow Christians; and something which has been our traditional central attraction.

Julian Smith

Layperson-in Charge, Brixton

Problems with being Unitarian

By Dorothy Haughton

One problem with being a Unitarian is that we have no creed so we say that, generally speaking, we all believe that Jesus was a man. We sometimes add that, therefore, his teaching can be followed by ordinary people who do it because they see its worth, not for any heavenly reward. But at no point do we ever say that it, therefore, behoves every Unitarian to examine his or her daily thoughts and actions to see if they fit in with the message of Christianity and, indeed, of all religions: Love thy neighbour as thyself. I know of certain congregations that have behaved dreadfully to their minister or fellow member of the congregation. If we can't behave well to each other we have little chance of behaving well to the larger community.

* * * *

One problem with being a Unitarian is that we believe in tolerance which, in my view, too often equates to a rather soapy way of speaking with no real change in thinking, e.g. we invite you now, if you wish, to do 'a' or 'b' or 'c'. Some Unitarians can go on for ages about the freedom we offer you to stand or not to stand, to pray or not to pray as though in other churches not standing up to sing the hymns, for example, would lead to a public flogging. Tolerance is about experiencing a particular behaviour and making a decision about how to deal with it without excluding or rejecting the perpetrator.

* * * *

One problem with being a Unitarian is that we have no hierarchy so that when, as Stephen writes, "liberal activists go to the Annual meetings and pass motions" these motions do not "filter down to grassroots congregations that are in many ways quite conservative." There is no central authority that can suggest that the church with three members amalgamate with the church with four members to save resources and increase the chances of regeneration. There is no central authority that can say to a church: "Your accounts are in a terrible state. Ms X is coming in to sort them out for you."

* * * *

One problem with being a Unitarian is that we have no code of conduct. I really do not want a creed or a hierarchy or intolerance. But I do wish that every church or chapel or meeting-house or fellowship would have a regular 'Are we being Unitarians?' service at which ideas about faith and especially, faith in action could be discussed. I wish it was easier and more accepted in Unitarian circles to speak out against people behaving badly, which we could possibly do if we had a way of dealing with bad behaviour without excluding or rejecting the perpetrator. There is a fascinating Quaker document on how to conduct a business meeting (see excerpt below) which would repay reading. Perhaps we need a nationwide, grassroots discussion about drawing up a document on 'How to be a Unitarian' or 'What it means to be a Unitarian'. But then, the letter announcing this would go out to Upper Pocklington Unitarian Chapel and be put in the bin because 'it is just more GA rubbish' and no member of UPUC would go to General Assembly meetings or conferences at Great Hucklow or any Unitarian Society or a district meeting or read *The Inquirer* or *The Unitarian* and so UPUC would continue to do as it has always done.

– Dorothy Haughton lives in Oswestry.

Excerpt: How Quaker Meetings Take Decisions

What is my role in the meeting?

As in any meeting for worship, your primary role is to listen respectfully to others and to 'the promptings of love and truth in your heart'. Even if you disagree strongly with another contribution, listen patiently to each to learn what you can, trusting that you will be heard in the same spirit. It is helpful if you prepare beforehand, read the papers and reflect prayerfully on the business, but remember that responsibility for the outcome belongs to the meeting as a whole, not to any individual. Come to the meeting with heart and mind prepared – not heart and mind made up.

Full article is at <http://bit.ly/qsNXuC>

George Eliot's Rosslyn Hill connection

By Jim Robinson

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), whose birthday is celebrated in November, lived from 1819 to 1880. Author of *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Mariner*, and *Middlemarch*, she is widely regarded as one of England's greatest novelists. Her life and thinking challenged the society around her. She was a declared atheist, a strong female intellectual, and perceptive about human relations. She was openly the long time partner of a married man (George Lewes), and at the end of her life married a man two decades younger than herself.

Was George Eliot a Unitarian? No.

Was George Eliot an active in a Unitarian chapel? Yes – Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in London.

Kathryn Hughes has been a lecturer in 19th century English literature (teaching at several British universities) and author of the book *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*. When describing George Eliot's late marriage to John Cross, Hughes writes: 'The service was not held at the Leweses' unofficial parish church of Rosslyn Hill Chapel, but at the Anglican Church of St. George's...'

There is ample evidence that George Eliot and her partner George Lewes attended services at Rosslyn Hill Chapel on occasional Sundays and for important rites of passage. When George Lewes' son was married, to a woman named Gertrude, it was at Rosslyn Hill Chapel: "Gertrude was raised a Unitarian in Smith's household, and was married March 1865 to the son of George Henry Lewes, in Rosslyn Hill Chapel, with George Eliot in attendance," according to Dorothy and Roy Porter in *Doctors, Politics, and Society: Historical Essays*.

Bury seeking new minister

The Rev Beryl Allerton, MA ended her Interim Ministry at Bury Unitarian Church, in Lancashire, on 16 October.

Anne Mills, who chairs the congregation at Bury, commented: "We are all tremendously grateful to Beryl for her efforts; with energy and enthusiasm, she has provided us with spiritual guidance, a huge amount of pastoral care, and a sense of stability and continuity; we have been fortunate indeed."

Bury continues to seek a permanent, full-time minister; Beryl has agreed to act as its Infill Minister, on a three-quarter time basis, until such an appointment has been made.

– Anne Mills



George Eliot

When George Lewes' son Thornie died (much loved by both George Lewes and Mary Ann Evans), the service was held at Rosslyn Hill Chapel: "The day after Thornie's funeral – at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, the parish church of unbelievers – Lewes and Marian left London for the country," according to *The Last Victorian*, which goes on to say that when George Lewes died, it was Dr Thomas Sadler, Minister of Rosslyn Hill Chapel, who presided over the ceremony: "The service, a kind of watered-down Anglican one, was conducted by Dr Sadler of the Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel."

And when George Eliot herself died, it was Dr Sadler officiating: "The service was again conducted by Dr. Sadler along Unitarian lines. 'O May I Join the Choir Invisible' was, inevitably, quoted during the ceremony."

Dr Sadler was Minister of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel from 1846 until 1891. In her history of Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Ruth Rowntree writes: "...Dr. Sadler paid tribute in his retrospect of 36 years when he spoke of the most unusual number of ministers and men and women of marked ability, highest character, genuine piety and most active benevolence who, at various times, had been members of the congregation." Rowntree goes on to name George Eliot as one of these remarkable figures taking part in the Rosslyn Hill Chapel community: "George Eliot (the novelist, who attended Rosslyn Hill Chapel with George Henry Lewes, but was not a subscriber)."

George Eliot was not a Unitarian. But she was an active participant at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in London. For that we Unitarians can take some humble but justifiable pride.

The Rev Jim Robinson is former minister at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel.

Chorlton Celebrates

On Sunday 4 September Nicky Jenkins was welcomed to Chorlton Unitarian Church as our new Lay Pastor.

Individuals from several congregations joined us in our celebration, and the Manchester District Association was represented by its President Ken Johnson. We are looking forward to an exciting venture with Nicky which has been enabled with the support of the MDA.

Look out for further news of us on our website: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/chorlton/



Beryl Allerton



Nicky Jenkins

News in brief



At the first concert of the 8th Series of Musical Extravaganza a presentation was made from part of the proceeds of the 7th series to the CEO of NW Air Ambulance, Linda Breslin. The next concert in this series will be held on 12th November and given by the famous Besses O'th Barn Brass Band.

Tickets at £7 can be obtained by emailing barryrbrown@googlemail.com or 01282 773336.

The picture shows (L-R) The Rev Jeff Gould, Linda Breslin, Barry Brown, the Mayoress of Burnley, Mayor of Padiham, Mayor of Burnley, Maureen Brown, Chris Powell celebrated international concert organist.

Psychical Studies Society conference held

In a break from tradition, the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies (USPS) decided to hold a one-day conference this year. The attractive venue of the Unitarian Chapel at Warwick was chosen for the September conference.

Our first speaker was Dr. Mark Fox whose talk was entitled "Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena", and he spoke about the extensive data collected by Alistair Hardy, of different kinds of light experienced by intelligent, rational people at times of crisis in their lives. After coffee, we heard Dr Roger Straughan speak about the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle concerning the synchronicity Dr Straughan had observed in paranormal events. For example, Roger's dog died of a sarcoma one night and he then picked up a book of Conan Doyle's short stories and randomly read, "His exit was as speedy and painless as could be desired", referring to the death of Arthur's dog from the same cause.

In the afternoon, we heard Anthony Peake give an intellectual talk entitled, "The Out-of-Body Experience: Neurological phenomenon or Noetic Encounter". He linked quantum physics with near-death-experiences and concluded that there was both a scientific and a paranormal explanation.

We had a very successful day in Warwick and are hoping that at least as many people will come to our weekend at the Unitarian Nightingale Conference Centre at Great Hucklow planned for 7-9 September 2012. For more information on the USPS see: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/psychical/

— Hazel M Reynolds

Cultural Craft Fayre at York

On Saturday, 12 November, York Unitarians host their annual Cultural Craft Fayre from 11am to 4pm. Come along to the Unitarian Chapel on St Saviourgate in the heart of York city centre to enjoy the warm and hospitable environment, refreshments, and gifts with a difference.

"This is a chance to buy different fair trade and ethically sourced gifts for Christmas," organiser Dee Boyle says. "People with stalls at this Cultural Craft Fayre are helping to raise funds for various projects and groups that they support in different parts of the world and also helping with their projects in the UK."

Craft and gift stalls include Tibetan, Native American, Indian, Mongolian, Palestinian, Ugandan, Rwandan, Latin American, world and fair trade goods, local-made crafts, and more.

Dee continues, "This Fayre allows the discerning shopper to buy gifts and learn more about the people and the areas of the world where they come from. At the same time, it helps the many people around the world for whom buying gifts is mostly not an option. The gifts you buy and the money raised may just be the difference between people surviving, putting food on the table, getting medical help or being able to get some education."

Entry is free, and refreshments are available all day. The ground floor of the chapel is fully accessible.

For further information on the event, contact Dee Boyle at 07761 762 967.



Patrick Timperley and Zoe Bremer represented the Mansfield and Nottingham congregations at Nottingham Pride. Only one other religious denomination was present – a Methodist church based in the centre of Nottingham. Zoe and Patrick distributed quite a few leaflets on behalf of The Nightingale Centre to various local and national voluntary organisations.

Subscribing to *The Inquirer*

- Keeps you informed
- Keeps the Unitarian flame lit

Join the conversation